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AUTHOR Gottlieb, Marvin R.
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ABSTRACT

Many college communication courses are now focused more on self-expression and interpersonal relationships than on traditional public speaking. However, by using the interpersonal communication approach, can classroom activities be developed that can result in measurable changes in a student's self-concept? In answering this question, several groups of undergraduate students were tested, utilizing the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. Some subjects showed little change in self-esteem following special assignments in interpersonal relationships. Where gains in self-esteem did appear, results showed that females tend to gain more than males but that exercises involving immediate and direct personal feedback in a classroom situation do not help those who presumably most need higher self-esteem. (RN)

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THE EFFECTS OF LABORATORY TRAINING METHODS ON HIGHLY STABLE VARIABLES SUCH AS SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-DISCLOSURE

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Marvin R. Gottlieb
Herbert H. Lehman College

At the present time it appears that there is a strong movement away from the traditional public speaking orientation in basic speech courses toward what is most often called the "interpersonal approach." Self-discovery is becoming as much a goal as self-expression. Even where traditional approaches are maintained, there has been a marked acceptance of the interpersonal approach to teaching communication.[1] But with a few notable exceptions research has been confined primarily to psychotherapeutic situations.

Since I find much of what is being done in the classroom under the heading of "interpersonal" both interesting and exciting, I would not want to discourage anyone from experimenting with interpersonal methods. However, there is a need to establish realistic expectations for the end-product of these methods.

A logical place to begin such an investigation is within the area of "self-concept." Much work has already been done in this regard by psychologists such as Maslow and Rogers which sheds light on what we might be seeking in our non-therapeutic

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classroom situations. For the purposes of this paper, I will confine myself to the findings on self-esteem.

Simply stated, as a person becomes more "adapted," "adjusted," or "actualized," he esteems himself more highly. Rogers has shown that at the end of therapy, a patient profiles himself very close to what he profiled as his ideal self at the beginning of therapy.[2] To put it another way, there seems to be a great deal of agreement concerning the relationship between mental health and self-esteem. It follows, then, that one of the outcomes we might hope for in employing interpersonal methods in the classroom would be higher self-esteem levels.

The following is a brief account of the studies which I have undertaken over the last three years; and a summary of the results of these studies and others which attempt to answer the basic question of this research: Can a classroom exercise be developed which would cause <u>measuarble</u> changes in the individual student's concept of self?

Beginning with this question, a pilot study was undertaken in the Fall of 1970. The students used for the study all attended Herbert H. Lehman College, a liberal arts college associated with the City University of New York. Each semester, approximately 1000 students from all grade levels enroll in Fundamentals of Oral Communication, the required basic course in Speech. At the beginning of the Fall 1970 semester, all students taking this course were administered

the Tennessee Self Concept Scale (TSCS) in conjunction with another project. The results showed that self-esteem was generally low. I decided to make an attempt to change some dimension of the self-concept (as measured by the TSCS) of a small group of these students.

I used my class of twenty five students as a sample, since they did not differ from the norm. From previous experience with these students, I knew that many of them had never given much conscious thought to their own concepts of self, or what they were projecting to others. Beginning with an exercise suggested by Keltner I asked each of them to choose an object which they felt best represented <u>them</u>; what they were really like.[3] Each student, in his turn, presented his object to the class with no other comment than his name. The class was then instructed to make inferences about what this individual was really like, based on the object which he had chosen. At the end of about five minutes, the student was asked two things: How did we do? and Is there anything which we didn't mention that you had thought about when you chose the object? The student was given as long as he wanted to respond to the second question. I might add that each student was astonished at how accurate the group had been in inferring the characteristics which the selection represented.

This whole process took two weeks, or six class meetings; at the end of which the students were retested with the TSCS.

I had hoped to raise self-esteem among these students,

but this remained virtually unchanged. However, changes in the posttest scores pointed toward a clearer, more consistent, more definite picture of the self.

A second study was designed to test these effects under more rigouous conditions. Six groups were randomly selected from the basic speech course in the Fall 1971 semester. Each group consisted of a minimun of twenty three students, but the groups were of unequal numbers. Three groups were given the TSCS as a pretest; the remaining three groups were not pretested to examine for possible test effect. The three groups in both the pretested and non-pretested categories were designated randomly, as one experimental and two control. At the conclusion of the experimental period, all six groups were given a posttest, again using the TSCS.

Six instructors from a group assigned a section of Fundamentals of Oral Communication were randomly selected to take part in the study. Each instructor was assigned an experimental or control task, which he administered to his section. The experimental and control groups were divided as follows:

1. Two sections received the object exercise which was the experimental variable. (N 58)
2. Two sections received a written assignment which called for a reflection of self. This was in order to isolate the social interaction variable. (N46)

3. Two sections served as control. They gave speeches of introduction, which was the normal first assignment in this course. (N 49)

The procedure was basically the same for the experimental group as in the pilot study. The control-1 group was asked to write an account of the way they felt they were coming across to others. The key difference in the treatment was that there was no feedback from the class. The control-2 group carried on with the normal classroom activity for the beginning of the semester.

A factorial analysis of variance was used on both the pretest and posttest scores.[4] The effects tested were pretest effect, sex, and treatment.

Sex difference had by far the greatest effect. The treatment had virtually no effect at all. However, it appeared that a combination of pretesting and the experimental treatment effected the standard deviations of males and females in exactly opposite directions. The males became more similar, while the females became more unalike.

The reaction of the females can perhaps be explained by the findings of Shapiro in his study of the relationship between self-esteem and self-disclosure.[5] Shapiro used the TSCS and divided his sample into high, medium, and low self-esteem groups based on their scores. He then administered the Jourard Self Disclosure Questionaire to each of the groups,

and found that subjects high in self-esteem were comparatively high in self disclosing behavior; while subjects low in self-esteem were found to be lower in self disclosure.

Females in the present study had a significantly higher self-esteem score than males on the posttest (P less than .01). Combined with the fact that there were a greater number of females in the sample, there were probably a greater number of high self-esteem females than males.

Doyne's study on the effect of a T Group experience on self-disclosure and self-esteem provides a clue as to why the separation is so great in the Experimental Group.[6] He found that those who were ranked high in self-disclosure increased in self-esteem during a T Group. Those ranked low in self-disclosure showed a decrease in self-esteem during the experience.

It is conceivable, therefore, that the high self-esteem females increased their scores as a result of the self-disclosure exercise, while those with relatively low scores moved either in the opposite direction or not at all. This would cause the sharp rise in the Standard Deviation score for females on several of the variables.

A possible conclusion which can be drawn concerning the experimental treatment in this study is that there is a strong suggestion that the exercise may have been effective with those individuals who had a high level of self-esteem at

the outset. In any case, it is reasonably certain that immediate and direct feedback about the self over a short period of time in a classroom setting does not help those who perhaps need the help most of all.

We have really only begun to scratch the surface of the problem of manipulating highly stable variables like self-esteem in the classroom. After doing an exhaustive search through the literature pertaining to self-concept, Adams and Fitts, in their excellent monograph on the subject, concluded in 1971 that very little experimental work in developmental psychology has been generated by self-concept theory.[7]

There have been a few classroom studies in self-concept change done since 1968, probably more than I am familiar with, since I am primarily concerned with studies which have used the TSCS as an instrument. However, it is interesting that only one study--done by Furr--conducted in the classroom got positive results for self-concept change.[8] While the results of Furr's study are questionable, even more unsettling, at least for those of us working with interpersonal exercises, is the fact that the treatment in this case was a standard course in "business speaking."

Further research needs to be done concerning self-concept change in the classroom, and it is suggested that any future research should contain the following elements:

1. Subjects should be grouped in high, medium and low self-concept groups based on pretest scores.

2. Those who administer exercises which call for a large measure of self disclosure on the part of the subjects should be chosen for their ability to make disclosures about themselves.
3. More than one of these exercises should be administered during the experimental period.
4. The pretest data should be compared very carefully with the normative data for the instrument to determine in advance if the sample deviates.
5. An effort should be made to have an equal number of males and females in each group.

What we need is more empirical study. We must determine how, if at all, our methods are affecting our students--both over the short and long term. In our quest for innovation, we must guard against moving directly from theory to practice without research in between. Sooner or later we will be held accountable for what we are doing in our classrooms today. I, for one, want to be ready with some answers.

FOOTNOTES

1. Joseph A. Ilardo, "Why Interpersonal Communication," presented to the International Communication Association, Phoenix, Arizona, April 22, 1971.

2. Carl R. Rogers, Client-Centered Therapy (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1951).

Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961).

3. John Keltner, Interpersonal Speech-Communication (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 61-62.

4. Program AVAR23 as generated in Donald J. Veldman, Fortran Programming for the Behavioral Sciences (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 268.

5. Arnold Shapiro, "The Relationship Between Self Concept and Self Disclosure," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1968).

6. Steven E. Doyne, "Effects of a Sensitivity Training Laboratory Experience on Self-Disclosure, Self-Esteem, and Social Desirability," (Unpublished Master's dissertation, George Peabody College for Teachers, June, 1969).

7. Jennie L. Adams and William Fitts, "The Development of the Self Concept," The Self Concept and Self Actualization (Fitts et al) (Nashville, Tenn.: Counselor Recordings and Tests. July 1971), p. 27.

8. Henry Bedford Furr, "Some Influences of a Course in Business Speaking on Certain Personality Traits of College Students," (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, North Texas State University, 1968).